To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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Practical Ideals for Rural Living

By Dr. Joseph Ackerman

It is especially appropriate that we pause at this time to consider some of the practical ideals for rural living. Today many people of the world are hungry. They are crying for more and more food for their families. With the present emphasis on food, we are more and more conscious of the importance of agriculture. Production of food depends upon productive soil, so the well-being of every one of us depends upon the maintenance of soil fertility. Likewise, development of people depends upon a rich culture.

Agricultural welfare is of concern to all people. The attitudes, values, and ideals of rural people are a continuing force which permeates all society. However, thinking people are beginning to look at country living with a critical eye. Rightfully they are asking if life on the farm is all that it is cracked up to be. Are rural boys and girls qualified to take positions comparable with those taken by young people of the city? Are rural institutions up to par? What is the standard of living in rural areas? Do we really gain strength in our democracy by having a large percentage of our people living in the country? Does the preservation of our rural culture actually contribute to the development of mankind?

Rural living at its best is the ideal for which we are all striving. It was the late "Uncle" Henry Wallace who once said, "Humanity never rises above its ideals. The most magnificent temple ever erected first existed in the mind of the architect, and fell below his ideal. What ought to be is always above and beyond what is. Unless, however, we have before us the vision of something better, we can never rise above where we are." [1]

I have been asked to meet with you and review briefly some of the ideas brought out at the American Country Life Association meeting held in

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[1] Henry Wallace, "An Ideal Rural Civilization," The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, New York, No. 108, Dec. 1945, p. 4. (This is reprinted from Vol. VI of the Messages of the Men and Religion Movement presented at the Congress of the Men and Religion Forward Movement, April 1912 and published by the Association Press.)

* Address by Dr. Joseph Ackerman at the Iowa Farm and Home Week, Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa, February 9, 1948. Dr. Ackerman is President of the American Country Life Association. We are grateful to him for permission to share his address with the members of the Christian Rural Fellowship.

June 1947 at the University of Dubuque. As you know, the American Country Life Association is a voluntary association of persons and organizations working for a worthy country life. It has always aimed to help people develop rural ideals and values. A brief examination of the reports presented by the special working committees to the last meeting may help us think through some of the practical ideals for rural living.

Appraising Rural Values and Ideals

Many rural people ultimately go to the cities and carry with them their rural attitudes. Therefore, they have a pronounced influence on business, professional, and industrial life. The committee on this subject at the 1947 A.C.L.A. meeting listed the following as commonly accepted but possibly debated rural values in contrast to urban ideals.

1. Rural life permits of more independence and freedom.
2. There is greater stability of attitudes, thinking, and action among rural people.
3. Rural people have greater security.
4. Rural life is healthier.
5. Rural people have a greater opportunity for property ownership.
6. Better home and family life prevails in the country.
7. Farm people have a greater interest in and a more constructive attitude towards their tools and other resources with which they work.
8. Farming requires greater diversity of abilities, and farm work is less monotonous.
9. Rural people are more religious.
10. Rural living offers more community relations and neighborliness.

Many of the farm insecurities of the past resulting from droughts, disease, and low productivity have been mitigated by the application of science. It was pointed out also that national programs are now being employed to reduce the insecurities resulting from low farm income. There are still large groups of tenant operators, however, who are less secure than owners. Farmers as a group have been concerned more with individual family security rather than group security.

Although the farm provides more constructive work responsibilities than does the urban home, city children are better prepared for the interdependent and commercial life -- by educational opportunities, health facilities and social experiences. The thought was expressed that the possible advantages of farm family life have been over dogmatized and that on too many farms children are not receiving satisfactory work experience, family discipline, education in health habits, and training in group activities.

The rural church and religious life varies among rural communities, depending upon economic conditions, educational and cultural experiences, and local leadership. Question arose as to whether the processes of farming provide greater emotional stability and religious participation than do urban jobs.

Appreciating Rural Arts and Culture

In rural areas a person has opportunity for creative work. Living close to nature and seeing familiar scenes of the countryside gives one an appreciation of beauty and a desire to excel. Art in its broadest sense, is

"just the best way of doing something that needs to be done." Art, therefore, includes all the fine arts (painting, sculpture, music, and drama) but in addition beauty and applied art are found in churches, log cabins, rail and picket fences, flower and vegetable gardens, orchards, wood piles, haystacks, home-made furniture, hand-loomed weavings, patchwork quilts, and even jelly and cherry pie. Whenever anything is "wrought with imagination, good craftsmanship, and a sense of beauty," it deserves a place among the arts...

In working toward a happier and more balanced life for rural people, it is important, therefore, that leaders concern themselves with sponsoring and supporting the cultural aspects as well as the business and technical phases of agriculture. Recommended procedure to create interest in the rural cultural arts include three important principles: (1) education for inspiration, (2) opportunity for group participation, and (3) recognition for accomplishments.

While there is a definite interest in the revival of our folkways, there are also strong forces that make for standardization in artistic pursuits. As various interests are merged through improved communication and closer social relationships, augmented by movies, radio, and other visual aids, there is a veritable "melting pot" of ideas and activities. The trend these will take, favorable or unfavorable to our rural life, will depend upon the leadership provided by the organizations and agencies in each community...

When talking about the study made by his department in 1939 to find out how many people were engaged in making handcrafts and other rural arts, Extention Director M. L. Wilson says, "American democracy is a way of life which has grown up around the hearthfire and the home and whose cradle was the early colonial community, where love of the soil, freedom of worship in one's own way, and mutual occupational interest combined to nurture an atmosphere of trust and confidence in one's neighbor.... Today as mankind again stands on the threshold of a new way of life -- a democratic way of life in an industrial age -- we may look to our rural communities for traces of the old arts and skills that flourished in colonial days. To these pioneer arts have been added many others by the millions of immigrants who joined our population as it branched out into the four corners of the continent. As we study the values in these arts and skills of a civilization that is passing we recognize indispensable qualities which we must recapture to strengthen and enrich the new civilization that is in the making." [3]

The study...showed that over 1,500,000 country people were doing handicraft work in 1938...Wood, cotton, wool, leather, metal and clay were the major materials used. "The total estimated value of handicraft products made for the maker's use was over $4,370,000, and the estimated value of products sold was about $1,950,000 in 1938." [4]

We need to consider cultural arts in relation to our social duties. What is there about our rural culture and background which contributes to a strong democratic nation? How have arts helped and how can they help in extending the ideals of rural people?

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[3] M. L. Wilson, "Introduction" to Rural Handicrafts in the United States by Allen Eaton and Lucinda Crile, USDA and Russell Sage Foundation cooperating. Misc. Pub. No. 610, 1946, p. 3.

[4] Lucinda Crile, "A Country-wide Study of the Arts and Handicrafts of Our Rural People," Pt. II in Rural Handicrafts in the United States, USDA Misc. Pub. 610, 1946, p. 37.

Promoting Better Family Living

"There are those who estimate the number of people needed on our farms in terms of the number needed to provide food and fibre for the nation (or the world). But family life on the farm is far more than this. It is an end in itself. It is the ideal situation out of which a rich culture may be developed. Most of us still believe that the family-owned farm possessed by persons with a high degree of physical, mental, and moral worth, is the cornerstone of civilization." [5] We cannot expect America to be stronger than the men and women who live in it.

The special committee on Promoting Better Family Living at the 1947 A.C.L.A. meeting decided that some of the difficulties facing the rural family which made it hard to develop worthwhile ideals are:

1. There is lack of economic security.
2. Competitive interests and community responsibilities exhaust the time and energies of many who have the finest ideals.
3. Affection in the average family is not shown sufficiently to provide adequate emotional security.
4. Children must learn to adjust to more people -- to have a gradual transition from the home to the larger world.
5. Life is an interrelationship of the economic and the spiritual. Insights -- the spiritual factors -- are tremendously important.
6. Environment too often conflicts with morals and ideals. The home is the center but not the circumference in the rearing of children.
7. There is too little unified family planning. Running a home is not the sole responsibility of the mother but should be a cooperative enterprise with several generations actively participating. Neither can split families provide adequate training.
8. More of the principle functions of life must be carried on in the home. The child should be acquainted with the realities of the cycle of life and death. Instead of taking these profound functions of life out of the home why not utilize our modern scientific methods and make these events a part of home life. The home will cease to be if it is used only as a filling station and a transient hotel...

Educating Rural Youth for Tomorrow's Responsibility

The rural educational system is not only training farm men and women of tomorrow, but also many urban citizens, for each decade several hundred thousand young persons educated in rural schools migrate to cities. Therefore, the training our boys and girls receive will not only determine the character of our rural life, but will affect the ideals, philosophy, prosperity and greatness of the whole nation and will influence the world.

Some people claim there should be a sharp distinction between the objectives of school education in rural and urban areas. But others like Sherman Johnson say, "We should not expect most of our rural youth to stay on farms. This is the inescapable conclusion to be drawn from the technological advances in agriculture, the increasingly competitive nature of farming, the relatively

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[5] Grace E. Frysinger, "The 1937 Presidential Address," The People and the Land, Proceedings of the Twentieth American Country Life Conference, Manhattan, Kansas, Oct. 14-16, 1937. p. 15.

high rural birth rate, the outlook for markets for agricultural products, which are always more circumscribed than the markets for industrial products, and the future employment opportunities in agriculture."[6]

The committee at the A.C.L.A. meeting on Educating Rural Youth for Tomorrow's Responsibilities referred in its discussion to all formally organized programs of education for children and youth in open country and village communities. Special attention, of course, was given to the school, first consideration directed at those rural ideals and attitudes which should be reinforced or capitalized upon by educational forces.

In the past, two rural characteristics have been "individualism" and "cooperation". These are somewhat conflicting, but both are necessary parts of what is sometimes described as the "American Way of Life". People in rural areas must be self-reliant and do many things for themselves. At the same time, they often need to work together.

Rural people take more interest in and have more control over local affairs than do people living in cities. They have a greater sense of satisfaction in accomplishment, are less afflicted with a sense of futility and frustration. More opportunities for participating in recreation are theirs.

In preparing youth for tomorrow's responsibilities it is important to know what those responsibilities will be. In the face of uncertainties and the unpredictable both in rural America and in the world at large, this much remains certain: There will still be need for a sense of civic responsibility, for leadership, and for a knowledge and understanding of people and of world affairs. In the development of these qualities volunteer youth organizations can make significant contributions.

The three r's are still the backbone of the school curriculum but to them have been added other fundamentals, such as the democratic technique of approach to all problems, and learning to walk down the street in peace with one's fellow men. The program of rural education should be realistically concerned with the problems and processes of life in rural communities. In transmitting the common heritage, the cultural and spiritual -- referred to by some as the fads and frills of education -- should not be neglected either for what they have meant in the past nor for what they can mean in this present confused and perplexed world.

To recapture or maintain the interest of local people in their schools is a "must" for better education. An advisory council may aid in reaching this objective. Every man and woman should have a substantial responsibility for the financial support of his school. The state and federal governments should share in that responsibility, with thought to bringing about more nearly an equality of educational opportunity.

Science and the mechanization of agriculture have made larger farms feasible in some sections. These, coupled with smaller families, have reduced the number of children in some neighborhoods to a point where the maintenance of schools is no longer desirable. In most rural areas, there is need for school district reorganization into larger administrative units. For few children should high school education have to be purchased outside of their own administrative school units.

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[6] Sherman Johnson, "Training Rural Youth for Farm and Other Occupations," Land Policy Review, Vol. VIII, No. 3, 1945, p. 7.

The teacher is the most potent single factor for better education. Better working and living conditions, increased social recognition and more nearly adequate salaries are imperatives for teachers. Rural schools have had more than their share of emergency teachers. Certification laws or regulations in many states tacitly approve lesser qualified teachers for rural schools. Colleges, sensitive as any other institutions to public pressure, give an undue proportion of their attention and effort to urban school demands. This can be changed and will be changed when an informed rural people make their wishes known and their demands felt...

The A.C.L.A. conference committee on this topic decided that the extent to which human resources of a community can be mobilized or put into readiness for action depends upon: (1) the need for their mobilization, (2) how well the need is understood by the people, (3) the amount of local leadership which has been or can be developed, (4) the methods or techniques used in arousing community consciousness or pride, and the determination to do a specific undertaking, and (5) the degree to which one works through the natural leaders and natural groups of people in the way they are used to working.

Some of the reasons why coordination of human resources is needed are:

1. Nowadays, too many special interest groups and programs hit at the rural family and often from different angles.
2. Programs and activities of numerous agencies and groups now tend to be specialized, and often come from the top down, whereas local community-wide problems usually fall outside the scope of any one special-interest group and go unattended.
3. Agencies and organizations need to reach more people, i.e., all segments of the rural population. Oftentimes such groups as tenants, young people, those in isolated communities, and those of different nationalities are left out of present programs.
4. In many places there is a duplication of program or efforts; also a duplication of duties for a selected, limited leadership which therefore means overwork...

Finding Agriculture's Place in Foreign Relations

Farm people as a whole are predominantly individualists and have in the past been isolationists. This attitude is changing somewhat due to the greater awareness of international problems. Farmers are beginning to realize that they have a stake in what goes on in Europe, in South America, and elsewhere. They need a more thorough understanding of the issues involved, however, in order to realize their full responsibility. An effective educational program is needed to help farm people assume their rightful place in the world which is considering: (1) foreign trade, (2) stabilization of exchange, (3) foreign investments, (4) feeding the world, (5) governmental commercial policy regarding the movement of goods and services, and (6) world peace.

The committee on foreign relations at the 1947 meeting of the A.C.L.A. came out with the following points:

1. In today's world, no relationship with another people, in the economic, cultural or political aspect, is truly "foreign" to American farmers. Failure to arrive at peaceful relationships carries the fearful threat of mass destruction which might end civilization itself.

2. The possibility of peaceful political relationships rests upon discovering the areas of common agreement among the peoples. A sufficient minimum of agreement upon the most fundamental values must be the beginning point. One area to which farmers hold the key lies in the need and hope of all men for enough food, clothing, and shelter. There is no peace in a hungry world.

3. Production alone is insufficient to make possible the achievement of this minimum ideal. There must be distribution of food and clothing materials. This requires reestablishment of trade on a basis freer than at present from private monopoly and restrictive devices such as prohibitive tariffs, import quotas, currency regulation and state trading by which all the world's governments are controlling and directing trade. These devices limit the opportunities of consumers to utilize agricultural products...

4. In the field of economic relationships, the United States is working toward restoration of more balanced conditions through such national and international programs as reciprocal trade agreements, the proposed International Trade Organization, the Export-Import Bank, and the World Bank and Monetary Fund. Certain aspects of the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization are especially important in the economic field, relating directly to improving diets of the world's people to provide at least minimum health standards and to stabilizing prices of farm products at fair levels. These general objectives are also among the aims of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers, the new world organization of farmers. The committee noted that farmers and others should familiarize themselves with the objectives and activities of these broad programs.

5. In the field of cultural relations, farmers may hold a key position for contributing to enlarged mutual understanding. This assumption is made because farmers, who constitute about three-fourths of the world's people, are the largest group in all nations to share common experiences and thus should find common points of reference in the values of rural living. Through such organizations as the International Federation of Agricultural Producers, the Country Women of the World, and the Food and Agriculture Organization, it may be possible to develop broader common acceptance of rural values.

6. If, around at least minimal common agreement on fundamental human values, a beginning basis for world political organization can be constructed, there is hope of eventual peace. It will require on our part, as contribution to establishment of peaceful foreign relations, a demonstration that America does believe, and in a democracy does accomplish the ideal of enough food, clothing and shelter for all. This calls for a strong, production economy. Furthermore, we must help others provide for themselves. In addition to immediate private and public relief measures, there must be prompt and vigorous assistance in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of agriculture and industry of Western Europe including Germany.

7. Finally, the committee felt that the groups represented in the American Country Life Association should, with the greatest dispatch, carry to the farmers of America the urgency of acquainting themselves with the situation, with the work of world organizations designed to promote peace, and with the opportunities of farmers to contribute.

Developing a Good Public Relations Program for Agriculture

God has been good to us and given us a land rich in natural and potential resources. Still it is true that no nation has been more wanton, destructive, and careless of its heritage. Land by the millions of acres, forests by the hundred thousands of acres have been destroyed, denuded, and burned. Is it not sinful to pass such a heritage on to our children and our children's children? Who is responsible for this wastage? What can be done to make amends?

The first step is a better understanding of conservation problems; not only on the part of farmers themselves but of all people so they know rural conditions. This means building "public relations." It has been said that "The basic aim of a public relations program should be to promote a better society as reflected by improved individuals lives and personalities through better mutual understanding of common problems." [7]

The responsibility for developing this understanding rests very largely with rural folks. It is essential that we bring the economic and social problems of the farmer before the nation and impress upon everyone the importance of a sound and flexible agricultural program which can be adapted to the needs of the community. It is difficult for urban people to understand the burning of potatoes and killing of little pigs while millions are starving. It is hard for them to understand the need for price support while prices consumers pay are skyrocketing. It is almost impossible for them to understand the need for crop restrictions while people are still hungry and naked. One could go on, but suffice it to say that there is need for developing a good public relations program which will bring the issues, problems, and facts before the people so they can arrive at sound conclusions. A national policy should be developed which does not favor agriculture over labor and industry but gives it its rightful place...

Actually the public relations job for agriculture is a tremendous one, confused largely because agriculture is so big and so complex and involves so many people. Maybe, too, we are late in getting the job underway, but the reward will be great if a good relationship is developed...

The Challenge

All of us need to be concerned with the ideals and attitudes of farm people but no great improvement in rural living will come unless farmers themselves set up ideals toward which to strive. It has been said that every created objective is the embodiment of a mental vision and that great deeds are the offspring of great ideas. The task is big but can be accomplished if we have the vision and the courage to put our ideals into reality.

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[7] Rural Life in a Changing World, Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth American Country Life Conference, East Lansing Michigan, June 11-13, 1946. p. 19. (Committee report on "Public Relations Programs for Agriculture")

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